

Using the MYP unit planner

Schools must follow this planning process, while use of the MYP unit planner template provided here is recommended. If the format is adapted by schools it must still adhere to the processes described. MYP units of work may be planned by individual teachers, groups of subject teachers, or by a team of grade-level teachers, either wholly or in part. It is essential that schools decide where the responsibility for developing units lies. Also, schools must ensure that units are planned in the context of whole-school curriculum planning.

There are two stages of planning when developing a unit of work, plus an overarching stage of reflection. The stages are present to give an emphasis to stage 1 over stage 2. Stage 1 ensures that units are in line with MYP philosophy and requirements, and stage 2 provides supporting detail to stage 1. The stages are developed by placing elements of “backwards planning” in an MYP context. Units should be planned with reference to vertical and horizontal planning documents for subjects and areas of interaction.

It is recognized that teachers will move between and among the various elements within each stage. Teachers may even move backwards and forwards among the stages as they identify issues, difficulties or opportunities as the unit unfolds. This movement is necessary to the development of units of work that link together all the elements of the programme. Curriculum design is recursive, not linear.

Within the unit planner and later in this chapter there are questions to guide teachers in their planning and to stimulate reflection. Teachers may wish to add their own stimulus questions in addition to these. Please note that some questions are purposefully in the singular or plural—this is to indicate that while some questions will always be answered from the teacher’s perspective, some questions will need to be answered from the perspective of the teacher, student, and/or the school as a whole.

Stage 1

This stage can be summed up as the integration of key elements of units of work:

- the significant concept(s) for the unit
- the area of interaction focus
- the MYP unit question
- the summative assessment.

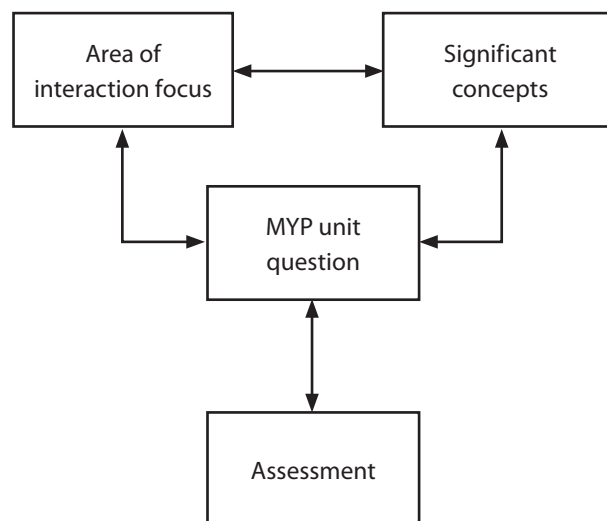


Figure 13

Integration of the significant concept(s), area of interaction focus, MYP unit question and summative assessment

Significant concept(s)

When considering the subject-specific content (dealt with in stage 2) to be taught over the time period of a unit, teachers will need to identify that which is most significant. Teachers need to identify the underlying **concepts** in the content to be taught, and should tease out the most significant of these concepts. These are the big ideas of the unit that the students need to retain for the long-term future. It is recommended that teachers draft a statement setting down the goal of the unit in terms of these concepts. This statement can be listed as the significant concept.

An example of such a statement from biology is, “Students will develop an understanding of how animals and plants are adapted to their habitats.” This statement was derived from an analysis of the subject content in which students were expected to know a range of animals and plants, where they lived and their particular features. By further analysis, the teacher realized that the underlying concept that applied was “adaptation” and, to some extent, “form and function”.

The following are some questions that may arise from this statement.

- Has this concept been taught to my students in the past?
- Will this concept be taught again this year?
 - If so, is it preferable to combine it into one unit?
- Will this concept be taught again in the future, and why?
- Are any other subject teachers teaching the same or a similar, related concept in one of their units?
 - If so, can we collaborate to design an interdisciplinary unit?

Teachers will, as the planning progresses, identify subject-specific knowledge, skills and attitudes that will be learned during the teaching of the unit, and noted under “Content” in stage 2. Some of the skills learned will be subject-specific and others will be general learning skills that come under the heading of approaches to learning (ATL). The purpose of learning the identified knowledge, skills and attitudes will be to support and enhance students’ understanding of the concepts.

Area of interaction

The areas of interaction provide the contexts for learning the identified concepts, knowledge, skills and attitudes. Every MYP unit of work will have an **ATL component**; a shared and agreed set of skills that all teachers will develop in their students during the entire programme.

The context that frames an MYP unit of work is generally derived from **one** of the other four areas of interaction, although ATL might be the specific context on some occasions. Some subject content will be very clearly aligned with one or more areas; other subject content may not, initially, show any connection. Teachers and students should be aware that all content can be set in a variety of contexts; the choice of contexts will be left to teachers to refine as they come to use the planner more frequently.

It is possible that some subject teachers may approach the creation of an MYP unit of work from the areas of interaction first. It is recognized that some subjects may lend themselves more readily to this approach and that it presupposes a degree of familiarity with the areas themselves. If the context is chosen first, the most appropriate content may be chosen with which to explore that context fully. Additionally, there may be an opportunity to collaborate on planning an interdisciplinary unit if other subject teachers are planning units and inquiring with the same chosen area of interaction, or related concepts or issues, with the same class of students.

In any event, once the MYP unit question is drafted, further questions will be elicited. The areas of interaction **key questions** (see example questions in the “Areas of interaction” section) can be used to develop further the MYP unit question(s) and also provide rich scope for the development of subsidiary questions as the unit unfolds.

MYP unit question: integration of concept(s) with context

The MYP unit will be guided and driven by an **MYP unit question** that integrates the significant concept(s) of the subject matter with the context provided by one of the areas of interaction. It is recommended that teachers design the MYP unit question from only one area of interaction initially. At a later stage it is possible to change the context to focus the concepts through another area (which would also change the unit question); this strategy could be used to provide extended work when differentiating instruction for gifted and talented students, or to meet a changing need when repeating a unit in later years, for example.

Figure 14 shows the sequence of thinking when designing an MYP unit question. Whether the content or context is decided first, the end result is an MYP unit question that has two components, with the context either implicitly or explicitly stated. If the context seems implied in the question, the teacher must make the area of interaction **explicit** to students.

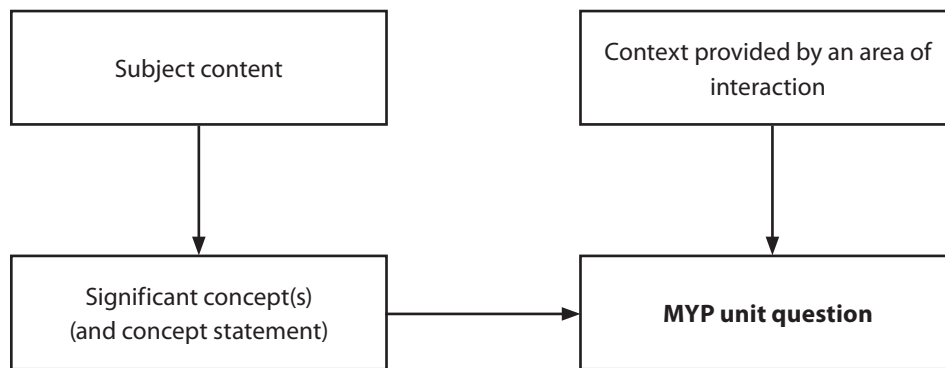


Figure 14
The sequence of thinking involved in designing MYP unit questions

In developing an MYP unit question, the following are proposed as useful criteria. Each question should be:

- **open-ended**—which means the unit should also be open-ended and provide for student inquiry
- **relevant and engaging**—linked to students' prior knowledge and experience as well as current circumstances; of interest to the students, and involving them actively in their own learning
- **challenging and provocative**—extending the prior knowledge and experience of students to increase their competencies and understanding
- **significant**—contributing to an understanding of cross-curricular concepts, through the areas of interaction.

The following are examples of unit questions.

- How are we affected by noise pollution?
- How accurate is "accurate"?
- Is sitting comfortably "healthy"?
- What is "cool"?
- How do different people celebrate?
- How has art been influenced by the environment of the artist?
- What does being "on time" mean?
- How does the environment affect our learning?

Integrating assessment

In the first stage of unit planning, good assessment and curriculum construction practice requires that teachers design assessment tasks that are directly linked to the MYP unit question(s). The assessment tasks should provide varied opportunities for the students to show their knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes. With the assessment tasks in mind, the appropriate assessment criteria can then be selected and aligned with the objectives that the unit will be addressing.

When planning for assessment, teachers should think like assessors rather than activity designers, clearly setting out what will distinguish students' engagement with the MYP unit question and learning objectives. Students should be involved whenever possible in the planning of an assessment task.

In planning for assessment, teachers should ask themselves the following questions.

- What is the function of this assessment?
- Which MYP objectives are being assessed?
- What evidence of learning will there be?
- How can the evidence be collected?
- Will the assessment task demonstrate understanding?
- Will the assessment be reliable enough to allow sound conclusions to be drawn?
- How will the assessment data be recorded and analysed?
- How and when will feedback be given?

Stage 2

Teachers should move on to stage 2 after addressing stage 1. The purpose of stage 2 is to gather together the available background information on students' prior learning, possible learning experiences and the availability and applicability of various teaching strategies, tools and resources.

Stage 2 is not a linear process, as the information gathered about one part may affect the planning in another part. For example, a review of available resources might mean a teacher needs to reconsider the assessment tasks outlined in stage 1. Similarly, a review of students' prior learning may mean that more time needs to be allocated for the teaching of skills and knowledge that were presumed.

Stage 2 involves the supporting details and can be summed up as:

- information on prior learning
- content
- teaching strategies
- learning experiences
- approaches to learning.

Content

There is space in this section of the planner to list the subject-specific content that was used to generate the significant concept(s). This content may be that which is mandated by state or national systems, it may have come from school-based requirements, or state standards. In such systems this step is the point at which standards may be "unpacked" in order to develop the big ideas or significant concepts for stage 1.